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Enlistment for the Farm

by

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ENLISTMENT FOR THE FARM

*A Message to the
School Boards, Principals and Teachers of the
Nation on how School Children Can*

Aid the nation,
Increase the food supply of the country in war time
and during a world-wide shortage of food,
Conscript the national enthusiasm for athletics to
national usefulness,
Assure a vigorous and healthy rising generation,
Reap the advantage of organized effort with its
moral and educational results,
Develop constructive patriotism.

The War of the Nations is a war of organized social and economic effort. Military force is only one factor in national organization. The ultimate decision as to victory may well be with the farmer. It has been said that success will be with the country that can put the last hundred thousand men in the field—and it is no use to put a hundred thousand men in the field if their stomachs are empty.

The Central powers have held out against an iron ring because they could feed their home population and their armed forces. Experts have watched, not so much the reports from the battle-field as from the farm. More important than another million men

for Germany is the coming grain crop. More important for us than an army of ten millions is the loyal American farmer. It is food that will win our battles. We must look to all to help in its production and in its economical consumption. *The school children of America can serve definitely, effectively and with educational results by helping in the plowing of Uncle Sam's acre.*

The world faces a serious food problem. The reports of the International Agricultural Institute show that for the first time in many years there exists a serious deficit in the total available world supply of corn, wheat, rye, barley and oats. This deficit is estimated by David Lubin to be about 150,000,000 bushels less than the normal requirements for countries open to trade. The problem is more than a general one. It is one which we at home in America must face. The crop report just issued indicates that the supply of wheat will be more than 50,000,000 bushels less than last year's supply. In Kansas and Nebraska, the winter kill and drought have made heavy inroads into the total product of those states.

Coupled with this is the general shortage in farm labor. In the Middle West the general industrial development has drained the worker from the farm into the factory. In the North Atlantic states the production of war munitions and other war supplies has taken men from the farms. In the South the negroes have been leaving for the North for work on northern railways and other enterprises where they have been offered profitable returns for their labor.

Added to all this is the complicating factor of no immigration of any importance from Europe since the mid-summer of 1914 and a large exodus to Europe at the opening of hostilities. There are not enough men to man our farms. *If we enlist the school children in this work they can serve with results as beneficial to themselves as to the nation.*

What, then, is the duty of the school? In the fight for food, and it will be a fight, school children can help. There will be better results from training drills with the spade and the hoe than from parading America's youngsters up and down the school yard. It is of no value to give military drill to boys of fourteen. A rifle is nothing for them to monkey with. But there is work for them that is important, valuable and educational. It offers first of all an opportunity to educators and teachers to develop Constructive Patriotism. It enables the teacher to help evolve in the growing generation the idea of universal service in the great battle of man against nature, which is something American, something great; and which is not a military idea transplanted from Europe. It gives a chance for the expression of the idea of service to one's country which is not of the destructive kind. There can never be any suspicion of a "militaristic" influence. Work of an agricultural nature permits us to mobilize our children in the great national and super-national struggle before us. It will employ for economic production a great unused labor force which is too young to join the fighting forces. It will give the children healthful exercise, a sense of reality which

means so much to children, and a sense of service in performance of work which is really useful.

We can only afford one fad in war time, and that fad is to be farming. But it will be useless for little William Corning Smith, aged twelve, of Kankakee, Illinois, to stick his little spade into his back yard before his admiring parent. Individual, unorganized work on land not properly prepared for agriculture may be worse than useless; it may be wasteful. Random efforts not coordinated in a general scheme for the utilization of school children in large units will be foolish, misdirected effort. State, county and even national organization are required to make available this latent power. Purely isolated effort will be fruitless, both as aids to the nation and education for the child. Organized work will bring the greater moral advantages of developing the power of concentration along with the interest in national and community-service. It will evoke an *esprit de corps* which may be capitalized for national use, and shift the usual interest in gangs and athletics, both normal and natural, to work which opens the way to loyal industrial educational training.

Organized work will sustain the interest of the school child. There will be none of that drudgery that comes with isolated work. A proper system would take advantage of the social and gregarious instincts and succeed in maintaining an interest sure to flag without social support. There should be scientific mobilization of school children in local districts so that they may be distributed for service in planting,

fruit picking, harvesting. They must be available in effective units for rush seasons, though they must not interfere with the labor market or serve as "scabs."

Of course, rural and village schools have the greatest opportunity to organize their children for farm work; but children in the cities may be sent into the country for camps and tent colonies and work on the soil. This would be practicable especially during the vacation period and would give fresh air and health to the children from the congested urban districts. Around our cities many of the farms of older days have been turned into the Gentlemen's farms. The Delaware valley and Long Island have many such estates. On these fertile fields, which have been withdrawn from economic production, the school children might be organized for useful work. There they will gain a knowledge of the world of nature, the discipline of useful work, acquaintance with country life and a broadened vision. Perhaps such an exodus of children might lead to a system of regular yearly migration from city to country which would be of great physical and educational benefit and help turn the tide from country to city.

Dr. P. P. Claxton, Commissioner of Education in the Department of the Interior, recently said:

In the schools of the cities, towns, suburban communities, and manufacturing and mining villages of the United States, there are approximately 6,000,000 boys and girls between the ages of nine and sixteen. Most of them are idle more than half of the year. They are in school less than 1,000 hours in the year, and allowing ten hours a day for sleep, are out of school more than 4,000 waking hours,—more than an average of nine hours a day,

not counting Sundays. National and State laws make it impossible for most of them to do any profitable work in mill, mine or shop, and many of them are forming habits of idleness and falling into vice. Even during the vacation months, only about ten per cent. have any profitable employment; only about five per cent. of them go away from their homes except for a few days. Still, they must live and be fed and clothed.

For four millions of these there is access to back yards, side yards, front yards, and vacant lots, which might be cultivated as small gardens for the growth of vegetables and small fruits. Many live where space could be easily had for chickens, ducks, or pigeons. And there are not less than 6,000,000 older boys and girls and adult men and women for whom an hour or two of work each day in a garden would be the best form of recreation and rest from the routine of their daily labor in office or shop, or mill, or mine, and who might easily find the time for it.

With some intelligent direction, these school children and older boys and girls and men and women might easily produce on the available land an average of \$75 each in vegetables and fruits for their own tables or for sale in their immediate neighborhood; fresh and crisp through all the growing months and wholesomely canned and preserved for use in winter. This would add \$750,000,000 to the best form of food supply of the country without cost of transportation or storage and without profits of middlemen. The estimate is very conservative, as has been shown by many experiments.

In addition to the economic profits, there would be for the children health and strength, removal from temptation to vice, and education of the best type; and for older persons, rest and recreation in the open air and the joy of watching things grow.

The work should be planned and conducted so as to reap its educational value. The children should not only get some knowledge of farming, but every effort should be made to cultivate nature study, investigations of plant life and growth; study of insects—those which help the farmer and those which hurt him. In

addition, some fundamental training in mechanics and arithmetic should be arranged for.

This is not a dream.

It can be done.

By the teachers of America.

There are about six weeks left in this school year.

Now is the time to organize this work.

School boards and educational agencies should commence to make their plans. Delay is dangerous. This work of national education and national production will succeed if the teachers and parents cooperate with the school authorities. The work would be worth while even if we were not at war, and if there were no food shortage. But as we are at war and as there is a food shortage, it is the duty of parents, teachers and school boards to consider the organization of school children into farming groups.

Just as children should not act in isolated and scattered ways, so the teachers should seek cooperation in every way. Enlist the sympathies of school boards, of influential citizens, of the farmers, of all existing agencies, like corn clubs and canning clubs; call on county agents and agricultural colleges and experiment stations for aid in making plans and for supervisors. Put as much leadership as possible in the hands of the abler boys and girls. Perhaps some who have not shone in book work will be the first to make good if given active practical responsibilities. The work is for the good of the whole community. Let it be done in a community spirit.

But the first step must be taken by the educators. They are the ones who are in contact with both the youth and the other members of the community. If they rise to the opportunity, the work can be accomplished. They will rise to the opportunity if they realize its nature. It is a chance to link the school with life. It is a chance to develop for the first time in the history of the world in time of war a constructive and industrial instead of a destructive and militaristic patriotism. All can join without distinction of race and creed, or even of previous sympathy. It is service not only for our own country and for the countries on whose side we are fighting, but a service to the whole world when peace shall again dawn.

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